DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

When this study began, my purpose was to execute a review of theories and empirical studies concerning the requisites of democracy in the Third World. My ambitions were to present the different explanatory hypotheses which had been put forward, and report the extent to which these had been confirmed by the extensive empirical research done on the subject. In other words, by utilizing the available research literature, I intended to produce both an interpretation and an evaluation of the current theories.

Working along these lines I soon realized, however, that I would not be satisfied with the outcome. For several reasons, it was in many cases difficult to draw any distinct conclusions from the empirical research at hand. In certain interesting fields no studies had in reality been executed; at least not on a broader, comparative scale. And in other cases, where investigations of such a kind existed, the empirical indicators used as measurements of the potentially explanatory factor sometimes seemed doubtful. In addition, there was a significant variation with respect to the selection of countries – both in terms of the size of the sample and its geographical profile. What is more, the treatment of the issue to be explained – democracy – involved many problems. First of all, the general indicators of democracy that have been used by different researchers vary to a considerable extent. Furthermore, the information on the actual circumstances in the countries at issue is in many studies taken directly from available data catalogues which, when examined, convey – at least for this purpose – a most unreliable impression. The classifications made are frequently very crude and, in addition, sometimes wholly unspecified.[1]

For the shortcut to an empirical material which these catalogues indeed constitute – it is just a matter of transcription – one must, in my view, pay a high price in the form of uncertainty of what the information really represents.

Instead of drawing on other's work, as I at first attempted to do, I decided to undertake my own empirical study. The object thereof would still be the Third World. The reason for this was simple: it is there that we find the greatest variation with respect to democracy. In order to obtain as large a sample as possible, I chose to include all the sovereign states[2] in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Oceania, with the exception of the OECD countries (Australia, New Zealand and Japan). These amounted to 132 in all; they represent some 80 per cent of the number of independent states in the world.

It is worth emphasizing that the issue to be discussed in what follows is the varying *level* of democracy at a certain point in time (1988), which should not be confused with the question of the *stability* or the *duration* of democracy.[3] In the latter case, it is a matter of how long certain standards of democracy have been maintained. Had this been our object, we would endeavour to produce a time scale based on a dichotomy; we should seek to grade (in terms of, e.g., number of years) the states which during a certain period attained a level acceptable from a democratic viewpoint.[4] For the part of the world here in focus, we could then obtain a fairly limited sample: applied to, let us say, the last twenty years, roughly 25 per cent of the states would be of interest. But for the purpose of this study, we are interested in the variation along the whole scale concerning the level of democracy – from the very lowest degree to the highest – at a certain time. Thus, obviously, all the states should be included.

Part 1 of the book is devoted to the establishment of such a scale, on which could be read the countries' relative performances from a democratic point of view. This involves a discussion of the very meaning of democracy, including a concrete specification of its essential elements. With this as the basis, a number of theories pertinent to the requisites of democracy are examined in Part 2 – thus the purpose in this part is to find explanations for the manifest differences concerning the level of democracy among the states of the Third World.

PART ONE

Determining the level of democracy

CHAPTER I

Points of departure

The first task of the study consists in the establishment of the attribute which is to be explained, i.e., the degree of democracy in the countries under discussion. In purely practical terms this is a matter of compiling a wealth of data on the situations in these countries. But before this can be achieved, we must, of course, decide on which information we shall seek, and how this in turn is to be weighed and interpreted. We need a number of empirical indicators which to a reasonable extent reflect the degree of democracy in the different states. The question is, what should these measures be?

The simplest and, in view of the cumulative nature of science, most fruitful approach is to relate to a firm, well-founded tradition within the field of research – that is, if such a tradition exists. As was mentioned earlier, however, this is hardly the case. When we survey the fairly extensive research hitherto pursued we are immediately struck by the variation which prevails regarding the indicators of democracy which have come into use.[1] In the face of this motley assortment we can only state that whoever undertakes this task must make his or her own choice of indicators and give reasons for his or her stance. Such, in brief, is our starting-point.

How are we to proceed? It is clear that if the choice of empirical indicators is to be convincing it must relate to, and reflect the fundamental criterion of the theory of democracy, namely the general principles which characterize democratic government. This link 'backward' (or 'upward' if this is preferred) may be rendered more or less explicit and circumstantial. The common feature of the great majority of the studies is that the most convenient approach was chosen; the author takes the underlying criteria more or less for granted and instead concentrates on explaining which empirical measures and methods of enquiry will be used.[2] This strategy is understandable since it is thereby possible without further ado to

plunge into work and tackle the practical issues. The disadvantage is that we do not really know whether we are measuring what we set out to measure; the variation regarding indicators unquestionably gives grounds for general doubt on that point.

The problem is inherent in the issue: the very concept of democracy is a difficult (and perhaps also frustrating) one to tackle. As Robert Dahl says: 'Perhaps the greatest error in thinking about democratic authority is to believe that ideas about democracy and authority are simple and must lead to simple prescriptions.'[3] The distressing fact is that the principles of democracy are not wholly unequivocal and unchallenged in their implications; indeed in some respects they are even highly controversial (e.g., a recently published book on the subject bears the significant title 'The Battle of Democracy').[4] Is it then possible to do anything at all about the matter? Is not the concept of democracy so ambiguous and open to diverse interpretations that every attempt firmly to define it only becomes one voice among many in the large (and discordant) 'democratic chorus'? Not necessarily. I would maintain that it is indeed possible to give the concept of democracy a fairly clear content, at least at its heart. For everything is not in dispute and, although opinions differ, it is nevertheless feasible to spell out the main content – and we can hardly, in the social sciences, require much more of an investigation of a complicated concept.

It goes without saying that the definition which I shall present derives from certain premises. Firstly, it is based on a core formula concerning the principles of democracy (which I believe to be generally accepted). Secondly, it is framed by certain supportive arguments of methodological character which – in order that they may be clear from the outset – I will now introduce.[5]

(1) Definitions are commonly required to relate to accepted linguistic usage. While this requirement is very reasonable in terms of practical communications, we must admit that it does not lead us very far in our field. The Greek word *demokratia* means 'government by the people'. But we cannot define it further with the help of the conventions of linguistic usage.[6] Even if we confine ourselves to the scholarly debate we must admit that the concrete significance of the term has varied considerably. Indeed, as is well known, the principles of democracy have been championed in both Eastern and Western Europe. At the same time the forms of government which have been applied are radically different. In the controversy which

ensued linguistic usage can be of little help – for this is the crux of the problem.[7]

In order to escape from this and other, similar, disputes we could, as Robert Dahl suggested, resort to another term. For his part Dahl recommends the designation 'polyarchy' for the form of government which he analyses.[8] Yet he has met with little success.[9] The new designation has not won general acceptance, and even Dahl himself in his writings often diverged from his linguistic innovation and speaks just of democracy and non-democracy respectively in different countries. And I believe this is unavoidable. The word 'democracy' is so firmly established that we cannot disregard it. The problem is that it has been subjected to prolonged linguistic 'stretching'; hence the alleged ambiguity of the concept. As I hope later to demonstrate, however, the actual concept – the attribute of democracy – is far more precise than the use of the word in different contexts.

(2) Mention was made above of the relationship between term and concept (the meaning of the term). We shall now turn to another relationship, that between the concept and its reference, that is its equivalent in the world of the senses. Since we are bent on pursuing explanatory empirical studies we obviously want a concept (and therewith a dependent variable) which at least to some extent has an actual reference. Otherwise there would be no variation worth investigating. The question is what degree of linkage with reality do we require? Here I would plead for the moderate (and maybe seemingly self-evident) principle that the form of government we call democratic must be subject to realization among people who are alive today, and should apply to the organizational and infrastructural procedures for collective decision-making of which we have knowledge.[10] The point is that we cannot hold the view that for its realization democracy requires a wholly different breed of people, or that it demands purely speculative organizational and societal conditions of which we can have no knowledge today.[11]

At the same time, we obviously cannot be mere realists. The fact that a form of government can be realized does not entitle it to the epithet 'democratic'. It must also conform to a reasonable extent to the central principles of democracy. Thus we set two requirements: that the form of government be *possible* to realize, and that it appears *desirable* on grounds of principle.

(3) As stated above, our definition will follow from a core formula which incorporates certain essential democratic principles. These can be seen as general objectives which are eventually explicated and finally given an operational significance. We then adopt an essentially deductive approach; we logically derive certain implications from our nuclear criteria. We may thereby encounter problems since the criteria are not crystal clear and, in some cases, there may also be tension between them. Moreover, we must take into account the requirement of realism from which significant consequences ensue. This means that empirical assertions – concerning both facts and the connections between them – are included in the work of definition. The logical inferences are made, we may say, in a context of empirical knowledge. Given our knowledge of how different institutional arrangements function, conclusions can be derived from the core concepts concerning what democracy in actual appearance should be like.

Thus, a problem arises concerning how the definition should be delimited.[12] The overall objective is indeed to specify a concept which can be used in causal analysis, that is to examine the empirical connection between democracy and a number of external features. But already in order to determine what is to be explained (democracy) we must posit several empirical assumptions. And since these are inherent in the concept they are, so to speak, fixed; they cannot be held open for later empirical testing. At the same time we wish, when performing a study, to test as much as possible, which means that we want a minimum of 'locks' at the outset of our work.

Consequently this is the problem: the more we postulate in the definition, the less there is to study. Our ambition should therefore be to incorporate as few firm statements as possible in the specification of the concept.[13] The aim must then be only to include such as can be established with a high degree of confidence, on the basis of our nuclear criteria and with the knowledge we possess. However, in areas of uncertainty – regarding both the desirable and the possible – the question should preferably be left open.